

PROGRAM REPORT

Basin Planning Program

Historical Perspective

Regional Boards are required by Porter-Cologne to have Basin Plans that satisfy both state and federal requirements. Region 5 has two Basin Plans covering the Region: one for the Tulare Lake Basin and one for the Sacramento River and San Joaquin River Basins. Basin Plans must include beneficial uses, water quality objectives, descriptions of actions that need to be implemented to achieve objectives, time schedules to implement actions and a monitoring program to evaluate program effectiveness. The Region 5 Basin Plans, like those in other regions, were originally adopted in 1975 and involved a massive effort by the Regional Boards and State Board. State Board hired contractors to develop information and prepared a series of memos to provide consistent guidance in the development of the Basin Plans. The Region 5 Plans relied heavily on previous planning efforts, including the 1971 Interim Basin Plan and individual watershed plans.

A primary impetus for developing Basin Plans in 1975 was to make sure the State had a baseline planning program in place to qualify for federal funds to build municipal wastewater treatment facilities.

Funding for basin planning has never been adequate and has fluctuated greatly over the years. Major basin plan efforts included updates and revisions in 1984, 1989, 1994 and 1998. Significant revisions have included the following:

- Site specific metals objectives for the upper Sacramento River watershed
- Averaging periods for pH, turbidity and temperature
- Policy to clarify how effluent limits are derived from water quality objectives
- Control programs for selenium in the San Joaquin River watershed and for rice pesticide discharges in the Sacramento River watershed
- Guidelines for winery waste, pesticide rinse water, erosion and mining
- Criteria for oil field wastewater and subsurface agricultural drainage in the Tulare Lake Basin
- Incorporation of the State Board's Sources of Drinking Water Policy with exceptions in the Tulare Lake Basin
- Policy for compliance schedules and mixing zones

In addition, about every three years, a triennial basin plan review is completed that assesses the appropriateness of existing standards and evaluates and prioritizes basin planning issues.

Over the years, the Basin Plan has been criticized by various interest groups, mostly in connection with perceived shortcomings associated with the original basin plan adoption in 1975. The adoption record of the original Basin Plans is not as complete as later revisions, mostly because there were no requirements in place that specified what records needed to be kept. Nevertheless, the 1975 Basin Plan record does contain enough pertinent information to document the rationale that supported decisions that were made (there are more than 20 separate documents in our files that are related to the adoption). Currently official basin planning administrative records document amendments and include staff reports that explain the rationale for proposed amendments, draft documents, comments, responses to comments, CEQA documents and descriptions of public outreach efforts.

Current Status

In the past our Basin Planning budget varied from a high of about 3 PYs to its current low of about 0.6 PYs annually. Virtually all of our current allocation is used to support Triennial Reviews. Our next Triennial Review is due in 2005.

Recently, interested parties have provided resources for us to address issues of mutual concern. Many of these interested parties are dischargers interested in effluent dominated water bodies. Following are brief descriptions of these efforts:

- Revision of the water quality objectives for pH, turbidity and temperature in Deer Creek, in El Dorado County
- Development of a regionwide basin plan amendment for pH and turbidity: The rationale for the amendment would be similar to what was previously adopted for Deer Creek.
- Evaluation of beneficial uses in Old Alamo Creek, New Alamo Creek and Ulati Creek. The primary issues are the applicability of beneficial uses for municipal drinking water and cold water aquatic life. We expect to bring a proposed amendment for Old Alamo Creek to the Regional Board by the end of 2005. Work on New Alamo Creek and the downstream watershed is just getting under way.
- Amendments are under development regarding beneficial use designations and water quality objectives in West Squaw Creek, a small tributary to Lake Shasta that is irreparably degraded from past mining activities.
- Drinking water policy is under development.

In addition to the basin planning activities described above, numerous basin plan amendments for TMDLs have already been processed or are under development. Details on these amendments will be provided in a status report on TMDLs that will be provided as part of the January Executive Officer's report.